Politics of Caste and Race from the Select Dalit and African American Autobiography: A Comparative Study

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Introduction:-

The word, "Dalit" literally means "oppressed". It is used as a synonym for "untouchable" or "Ashprusha". It also refers to casteless sections of India. Dalit is also called as an "out caste". It is a self designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as untouchables. They are divided into a number of sub-castes in India and South Asia. Etymologically speaking, the word "Dalit" comes from the Sanskrit word which means "down trodden", "Suppressed", "crushed", or "broken to pieces". It was first used by Jyoti Rao Phule, the champion of backward classes and other oppressed classes of Maharashtra in the 19th century. Mahatma Gandhi employed the word "Harijans", which means the children of Hari or Vishnu to identify them as children of God.

Sociologically, the neglected class doesn't belong to any caste or community those who are ignored, they are *Dalit.* The literary phenomenon, to which people call *Dalit* Literature in India, emerged in the 1960s. The primary motive of *Dalit* literature is the liberation of *Dalits* in India. The aim of *Dalit* literature is protest against the established system which is based on injustice and exposes the evil and hypocrisy of the upper caste. *Dalit* literature is based on *anubhava* (experience) rather than *anumana* (speculatation). Therefore, the authenticity and liveliness is the essential feature of *Dalit* Literature.

The Dalit Literature also can be seen in the Orient point of view. According to Edward said, "The Orient was almost a European invention and had been since a antiquity place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. The relationship between the Occident and Orient is the relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.*"* (K M Pannikar, *Asia and Western Dominance* London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959). "The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be "Oriental" in all those ways considered common place by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it could be- that is, submitted to being – made

oriental. There is a very little consent to be found, for example, in the fact that Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history." (Edward Said- From Orientalism page-21). In the thesis of the present research the theory of Orientalism will be elaborately discussed. The African American literature has become an inevitable part of American literature and culture. The strong presence of African American Literature has paved the path for the emergence of Native American, Asian American, and Chicano American streams of literatures. It is only with the significant representation of African American literature American society stands to be cleansed from the problem of racial discrimination. African American literature has examined the problem of racial discrimination in all its philosophical, existential and epistemological aspects. It has travelled from mid 18th century with slave narratives to the current times with all its socio literary exuberance initiating a literary and cultural transformation in the fabric of American society.

It was only during the mid twentieth century after the ground breaking influential socio political texts Booker T Washington's Up *From Slavery* (1901) and Du Bois's The *Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin devised a brand of African American Modernism. Right's *Native Son* (1940), Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Baldwin eloquent volume of essays *The Fire Next Time* argued for social and cultural emancipation of African Americans. The emergence of African American Women writings brought in double jeopardy of racism in African American Women's movement. Gloria Hull examined the dilemma of Black women in *All the Men are Black. All the Women are White, But Some of Us are Brave*. This has made many African American women to turn toward each other for a better introspective and analytical understanding of Black Women's problems. Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970) and Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) addressed the question of how self-identity and respect is achieved by a black girl in a society, which hardly values her existence. Tony Morrison expanded her thematic range from female identity to Black people relationship with African American past in her works *Song of Solomon* (1977), Beloved (1987) and *Jazz* (1991). These novels have explored folk heritage, slavery and motherhood. This is followed by Alice Walker's The *Third Life of Grange Copeland* that discussed the issues of poverty and family violence. She exposed the contradictions within the Black movement depicting the issue of domestic violence, father daughter rape and female genital mutilation in *The Colour Purple*.

Thus, the Dalit and African American people are purposely kept away from the literature, art, economy and politics. As far as literature is concerned the literature of the Dalits and African Americans is not considered as the body of an established literature.

The Dalit and African American literature is specially, flourished after the post colonial period. It can be seen in the subaltern point of view. The word 'subaltern' is derived from the Late Latin 'Subaltern us'. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary denotes that subaltern as noun means any officer in the British army who is lower than the Captain. Its adjectival forms denotes 'of inferior rank'. But Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci for the first time used outside the non military sense. In Latin 'sub' means 'under' and 'alter' means other. So literally denotes to any person or group of inferior rank and station, whether because of race, class, gender, ethnicity or religion. Gramsci's explanation of the bucolic peasantry in the Southern Italy depicts the persisted oppression of the rural peasantry, working class, and the untouchables in post- independence Indian society. (*International Journal on English Language and Literature Vol. II Page 36).*

Autobiography is a genre of literature which is a metaphor of the self and the journeys of author's own life and achievement. It is a very influential genre through which *Dalit* writers have portrayed a realistic picture of the *Dalit* world. It is the recent development that emerged after post-independence in India, and is the most important tool of *Dalit* literature. It is not just a remembering of past, but a shaping and structuring of them in such a way as to help understand one's life. Thus, *Dalit* Writing is essentially an expression of the reality of human life and a great piece of literature that depicts the reality with communicable lucid language facilitating narrative with reader's aesthetic and literary sense. Sharnkumar Nimbale's *Akkarmashi,* P E Sonkamble's *Aathvaniche Pakshi* and Laxman Mane's *Upra or An Outsider* are the pioneering Dalit Autobiographies.

"The genre autobiography in the African American literature appeared in 1760 to begin to prove that no one could do justice to himself better than himself. From these beginnings to the "year of Jubilo" in 1865 when full emancipation was proclaimed, black American autobiography evolved into a complex "oratorical" mode best exemplified in the narratives of ex-slaves who had become master rhetoricians on the antislavery lecture circuit" (William Andrews The First Century of Afro American Autobiography p 1)

The present research makes an attempt to focus on the problem of race in the Literature. Racism, according to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, "prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior" Racism is also defined simply as a reflection of the economic system and its cultural, ethnic and political ways. The concept of racism is derived from the word race and it is believed that one racial or ethnic group is inferior to another and the unequal treatment is therefore justified.

The African American literature has become an inevitable part of American literature and culture. The strong presence of literature has paved the path for the emergence of Native American, Asian American, and Chicano American streams of literatures. African American literature has examined the problem of racial discrimination in all its philosophical, existential and epistemological aspects. It has travelled from mid 18th century with slave narratives to the current times with all its socio literary exuberance initiating a literary and cultural transformation in the fabric of American society.

Thus, the present research will minutely study the elements of race, caste, sex and rape from the politics perspectives in America and India with the help of four and Dalit autobiographies.

Hypothesis

The present research begins with the hypothesis that –

1) There is a similar socio-cultural and political condition between the Dalits in India and the African Americans in America.
2) Both are subalterns, and dominated by the upper castes and European race in the respective countries.
3) Research may have done on African American and Dalit Autobiographies but it is considered that nobody has gone through the autobiographies – Upra *An Outsider* , *Aaydaan* 'Weave of My Life', 'Up from Slavery' and 'Dust Tracks on A Road' , considering the elements of caste, race and politics in those autobiographies.
4) A comparison between both is proposed to understand the socio political conditions in both the lands.
5) The research hypothesizes the three way domination of a Dalit woman in India and an African American woman in America is obvious.

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Objectives of the study

1) To study the Dalit and African American autobiographies in order to focus on the race and caste.

2) To study how the African Americans in America and Dalits in India have become the victims of socio-politics.

3) To study the elements of oppression, self negation, rape and agony in terms of the select autobiographies.

4) To study how caste and race deprived the Dalits and African Americans to lead their lives in a miserable social, economical, political and cultural conditions.

5) To study the notion of Dalit and African American autobiography.

Methodology of Research Work

The research methodology of this work will be exploratory, interpretative, evaluative and analytical. The theory of caste and race will be used to find out the different factors of politics in Indian as well as American society. The analysis of the select texts will largely be done on the theory of race and caste.

Review Of Literature:-

Ample of research work has done on the Dalit and African American autobiography, but the critical endeavour is not adequate. People have interpreted African American's Quest for Identity with all its phases, aspects, implications and nuances as reflected in the African American Fiction. Some of have examined the complex problem of identity of the African American in terms of their research.

Some scholars have explored the Fictional Canon of Paule Marshall and emphasized Marshall's commitment to the African American women. They researched on race, gender and identity and also explored the African American feminist fiction from Harriet Wilson to Paule Marshall.

As far Dalit Literature is concerned, research scholars have focused on the socio cultural protest with the help of their research work. Some researchers explored space or power of the Dalits in their

research. Thus, people also have done their research in regard of Exclusion and marginalization of Dalit men and women in Indian Society with the help of their research.

However, though their research work is worth mentioning the researcher thinks it is inadequate in regard of caste and race. Thus, the researcher intends to study Caste, Race and politics in the select autobiography, as to set a new perspective in the field of literary research.

Chapter I

Introduction and History of the Dalit as well as African American Literature

The very first chapter of the present research study will bring out the brief history of the Dalit Literature particularly of Maharashtra and African American Literature. The elements and notions of subaltern will also be discussed in this chapter. Both the forms of the literatures have become the prominent forms in the respective countries. In the Post colonial era the suffering of the African American people is variously brought out by a number of African American writers before the world. The African American, being a Christian was not treated as the same; being an American he was placeless at his own place. Thus, the suffering is brought out in the forms of creative writings by the Afro American writers.

Dalit literature has become the part and parcel of the Indian literature specially a part of Marathi literature in Maharashtra. The Dalit literature flourished specially in the post independence era. Host of writers and literary forms are emerged in this period in India. The sufferinhg of them is brought out by the writers like- Anna Bhau Sathe, Namdev Dhasal, Laxman Mane, Daya Pawar, Sharan Kumar Nimbale, Bebi Kamble and Urmila Pawar and others.

African-American literature has undergone a revolutionary change from Phillies Wheatley, the first African-American poet to publish her works, to W E B Dubois, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Walter Mosley, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, and Paule Marshall, the contemporary top African American writers and early writers also helped the African American writing move forward. Fredrick Douglass, American reformer, social orator, writer and statesman, is one of them. He escaped from slavery, and became the leader of the abolitionist movement, gaining note for his dazzling oratory and incisive antislavery writing. The issue of slavery and the subjects related to slaves such as adaptation to the new situation, slaves' objections, and breaking free

from captivity have been a dominant theme at the time of slavery. Most of the writings at the time of slavery were autobiographical.

Consequently, these autobiographical works written by slaves were named slave narratives. The slave narratives were the outcome of the conflicts between the southern Whites who supported slavery and the northern slaves who were seeking freedom from the oppression of slavery in the middle of the nineteenth century. A review of African American literature from slave narratives to the writings of the present modern Black writers will help us to examine the logical links and connections in African American literature.

Historically speaking, the collective enterprise we now know as African American literature is of rather recent vintage. African American literature was a post emancipation phenomenon that gained its coherence as an undertaking in the social world defined by the system of Jim Crow segregation that ensued after the nation's retreat from reconstruction. This social order, created by local and state-wide laws, statutes and , policies received Constitutional sanction in 1896 with the US Supreme Court's decision in Plessy v. Ferguson, and was maintained for decades by violence and intimidation, buttressed not only by the works of scholars, scientist, writers, and artists but also by the quotidian social practices of ordinary people. It was also through many of these same means that this order was challenged and sometimes acquiesced in by its victims, until it was finally dismantled, at least judicially and legally, in the 1950s and 1960s. African American literature took shape in the context of this challenge to the enforcement and justification of racial subordination and exploitation represented by Jim Crow.

Thus, in the first chapter of the present research work history of Dalit and African American literature will elaborately be discussed.

Chapter II:-

Booker T. Washington's: Up from Slavery

The book, *Up from Slavery* is an autobiography of a distinguished African American writer Booker T Washington. The fact of matter is that, the African American literature is considered as a literature of no importance, years together. The established class of the country did not pay any heed to the Negro people and their culture in America. Their

suffering was nothing for them. Purposely the literature, art, culture of the Negro people was given no significance. They are treated as subaltern.

According to Rajshekhariah, "Booker T Washington was one of the most remarkable men America has produced, a man born in slavery but lifted by his own vision and perseverance to a position of leadership and power. The son of a slave woman, Booker T Washington struggled to acquire an education for himself, and then dedicated his life to educating others.

In fact the book *Up from Slavery* is an eternal source of inspiration for a number of Afro American students". *(A K Rajsehekhariah, B R Ambedkar: The Politics of Emancipation, Sindhu Publication Bombay 1971, p 11)* Thus, the researcher asserts that the book *Up from Slavery* must be treated as a text here after.

The researcher may study the book meticulously in order to bring out the elements of atrocities, agony, distress and self identity in terms of the book.

Chapter III: - Laxman Mane's: Upra an Outsider

Upra is a masterpiece by Laxman Mane and it is also an important book in the field of dalit literature. The book was first published in 1980 in Marathi. The writer has made an attempt to bring out the suffering of innumerable dalits in India particularly from Maharashtra. He does not have proper schooling, being a nomadic he wanders with his parents for daily bread and butter. The family is a microcosm of a number of nomadic people, who are deprived of basic needs even after many years of Indian independence. The book shows agony and suffering of a number of people.

The researcher intends to find the elements, which compels to lead such a desolate life in terms of the present project. Caste is the basic element that has brought havoc in those people. Constitutionally caste is abolished, but it is not eradicated from the minds of the people. Thus, the researcher will appeal to change the mindset of the so called UPPER CASTE people. The politics behind castism made the people to be a zombie. The researcher asserts that the Dalit literature should be treated like the established literature.

Chapter IV: - Zora Neal Hurston's: Dust Tracks on a Road

Zora Neale Hurston, the distinguished African American female writer was born on January 7, 1891. Hurston wrote four novels and more than 50 published short stories, plays, and

essays, in her literary career. She is best known for her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God.*

Dust Tracks on a Road is an autobiography of her. This book was published in the year 1942. The writer, made an attempt to bring out the evil social factors in the American society with the help of the autobiography. She was the victim of racial discrimination of America. The literature of Negro is treated as a subaltern.

Thus, the researcher will minutely study the factors which are responsible for the degraded condition of the African Americans of America in terms of the present research work. It is also the sincere appeal of the researcher that the African American text must be treated with the established literature.

Chapter V: - Urmila Pawar's: The Weave of My Life

Urmila Pawar is one of the foremost literary figures in the Marathi Dalit literature. Her short stories, though comparatively few in number, have caught the imagination of readers. She is born in 1945, in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. The book *Aaydan* is published in Marathi in 2003 and translated into English in 2008.

The Dalit literature is flourished during the 70s, in Maharashtra and in India. The word Dalit Literature is used for the first time in the first Dalit Literary convention which was held in Mumbai. Literature is the platform through which the oppressed classes of the society put forward their suffering before the world. A big stratum of the society is deprived of the basic needs on the grounds of caste in India, years together. Dalit in Maharashtra are divided into a number of castes.

Mahatma Phule, Shahu Maharaj and Dr. B R Ambedkar are the champions of Dalit Movement in Maharashtra. All the Dalit writers have been deeply influenced by those social reformers.

The word 'subaltern' is drawn from the Late Latin 'subaltern us''. Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary denotes that the word, subaltern, as a noun means any officer in the British army who is 'Lower in rank' than a captain. Its adjectival form denotes 'of inferior

rank'. But Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci for the first time used it outside the non-military sense. In Latin 'sub' means 'under' and 'alter' means other. So literally it denotes to any person or group of inferior. According to some thinkers, perhaps he used the term as a synonym for proletariat. Literally, he refers to any person or group of inferior rank and station, whether because of race, class, gender, ethnicity or religion. Gramsci's explanation of the oppression of the bucolic peasantry in Southern Italy depicts the persisted oppression o the rural peasantry, the working class, and the untouchables in post-Independent Indian society.

Thus, the researcher may highlight and suggest some measures to bridge the gap between the established and the subaltern literature with the help of the present research.

Chapter VI: Conclusion with Suggestions:-

This chapter will be the findings of the Study.

The researcher has selected four Autobiographies to study for the research. Two are from the Dalit literature and two from the African American literature. There are two male writers, one is from the Dalit and other is from the African American literature, and one female writer from the Dalit and one from the African American Literature.

The major intention behind this research is to bring out protest and agony, which is there in the minds of numerous Dalit people in India and African Americans in America, from many years. Again, the researcher believes that, adequate research has not been done on these autobiographies. Thus, the researcher intends to do a comparative study on the socio political conditions of Indian Dalits and African Americans in America. There are many similarities between the Dalits in India and African Americans in America. The social, economic, political, and spiritual situations are alike in India and America. (For Dalits and African Americans) Thus, literature is the means, by which the Dalits from India and African Americans from America have expressed their protest, agony and expectations from the Upper Class people and White society in the respective countries. The suffering of the Dalits and the African Americans is the same. This is how the researcher will bring out the similarities between the two societies. There will be a comparative study on the socio-political conditions of the Afro- American people and Dalits. Despite this some fruitful suggestions will done through the study.

Data: -

The data of the present research work is Four Autobiographies by the four different writers. Two from the Dalit literature and two from the African American literature. This could be the primary data of the present research. The books, journals, e- journals regarding the African American literature and Dalit Literature will be used as a secondary data in the present research. Besides this, an interview, as a part of the primary data the researcher intends to conduct an interview of Laxman Mane and Urmila Pawar.

Scope of Research: -

The present research work will embrace only the four autobiographies from the dalit Literature and African American literature. *Weave of My Life, an Outsider, Up from Slavery: an Autobiography* and *Dust Tracks on a Road,* only these books will be studied under this project. Thus, the major focus of the study is on caste, race, politics, suffering, suspendedness and assimilation of the African American people and Dalits. It is hoped, that this research can be referred for the other social and literary researches in future.

Limitations:-.

As far as the present research work is concerned it goes through only four autobiographies from the Dalit and African American Literature. *Weave of My Life, An Outsider, Up From Salavery: An Autobiography* and *Dust Tracks on a Road.* It will neither embrace the other forms of the literature nor the writers from the said literatures. It means rest of the autobiographies will be excluded from the study.

Pedagogical Implication: -

It is a fact that race and caste destructed the lives of an innumerable African Americans and Dalits in America and India. The present research work will be beneficial for the students, teachers and researchers who will work on Dalit and African American Literature. The texts like, *Upra* and *The Weave of My Life* have been prescribed in some universities for the under graduate courses, so the students as well as teachers will be benefitted by this research work. The researcher hankers for equality. Many Dalit and Negro students had to leave their education incomplete. The brunt of the caste and race are even now being experienced by the

Dalits and Negroes. Therefore, the researcher expects that caste and race must not be observed in the sacred places like Schools, Colleges and Universities.

Significance of the Research: -

This research will be helpful to do the study of America and India in cultural point of view. The researcher also expects that this study may be useful to those who want to undertake the work of caste and race in America and India. It is a step further to bridge the gap between caste and race. Thus, the researcher thinks that both the countries will be benefited in terms of the research project.

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